

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Air Force

## Breastfeeding Rates and Factors Related to Cessation in a Military Population

Bales, K., Washburn, J., & Bales, J. (2012). Breastfeeding rates and factors related to cessation in a military population. *Breastfeeding Medicine*, 7(6), 436-411. doi:10.1089/bfm.2011.0113

**SUMMARY:** New military mothers may encounter difficulties in parenting and infant care that civilian mothers do not. Active Duty mothers and military wives or partners were surveyed about factors that impact achievement of breastfeeding goals. Findings suggest that although the majority of women did not believe military responsibilities had any impact on breastfeeding, many factors contributed to stopping breastfeeding early, and more military partners breastfed for 6 months or more compared to Active Duty mothers.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Thirty-seven percent of the women in the survey met their personal, pre-determined breastfeeding goal, and reasons for stopping breastfeeding included maternal difficulty (29%), mechanical difficulty (e.g., latching, biting; 13%), and inconvenience (10%), among others.
- Fifty-four percent of participants breastfed for six months or more, and 28% did so for one year or more; Active Duty women were significantly less likely to breastfeed for six months or more.
- The majority of participants (85%) did not feel that the military responsibilities of themselves or their spouse hindered breastfeeding in any way.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide educational material to expecting mothers about the benefits of breastfeeding
- Offer workshops that support women in military families in reaching their breastfeeding goals
- Provide military mothers with breast pumps and classes to teach them how to pump

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote awareness programs that educate mothers about military-related factors that contribute to premature cessation of breastfeeding and ways to avoid these difficulties
- Recommend partnerships between community providers and the DoD to encourage military families to follow universal guidelines based on national recommendations for breastfeeding
- Continue to support programs that allow deployment deferral for a specified time and provision of adequate space and opportunity to pump breast milk during deployment

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## METHODS

- Mothers who chose to breastfeed their newborn were recruited via records of deliveries at Florida's Eglin Air Force Base Hospital from 2001-2002.
- Women completed a telephone survey about their breastfeeding experiences.
- Frequencies regarding breast feeding (e.g., length, goals, impact of military responsibilities) were calculated and compared between different groups of mothers.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 254 Active Duty mothers (17%) and military wives or partners (83%).
- Of the mothers delivering newborns at Eglin Air Force Base Hospital during the study, 77% chose to breastfeed.
- No additional demographic information was provided.

## LIMITATIONS

- Participants were recruited from a single hospital and branch of service, so results may not generalize to the larger population.
- No demographic data were obtained as part of the survey; it is possible that unexplored demographic variables may have contributed to the findings.
- Mother's breastfeeding goals may have been different between Active Duty mothers and military wives, making it difficult to compare outcomes via individual goals.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate whether breastfeeding goals differ between Active Duty mothers and military wives and how differences in goals may impact whether mothers meet their breastfeeding goals
- Examine whether mothers' knowledge about breastfeeding is associated with greater breastfeeding duration and whether educational classes can increase military mothers' breastfeeding duration
- Explore factors that may help mothers' struggling to breastfeed continue to do so, such as access to specialist consultation, additional time for breastfeeding or pumping, or more access to lactation rooms

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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